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Abstract:

This article reviews the *Aarhus approach* to the study of Islamism as presented in a series of articles by Mehdi Mozaffari and Tina Magaard. The core contribution of the *Aarhus approach* – the argument that Islamism constitutes yet another form of totalitarianism – is found to be forceful and thought-provoking. The academic utility of this approach is difficult to evaluate, however, since empirical evidence in the form of structured comparisons is not provided. This is partly due to the lack of a definition of totalitarianism to facilitate comparisons with Nazism, Fascism and Stalinism, and partly due to a lack of interest in comparisons along other relevant dimensions, including manifestations of radicalized/securitized religion drawing on the vocabulary of religious traditions other than Islam. It is argued that the definition of Islamism as totalitarianism is upheld by methodologically privileging texts over practice and definitional claims over empirical evidence. As such, the approach reflects an anthropological and sociological deficit excluding analyses of practices from textual reading and a hermeneutical deficit excluding various existing interpretations. Most importantly, these criteria for demarcating Islamism have important consequences for security political strategies for uncoupling the relations between Islamism and violence.

Keywords: Islamism; radicalism; securitization; terrorism; totalitarianism.

> We have seen their kind before. They're the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the twentieth century … They follow in the path of fascism, Nazism, and totalitarianism. (Bush, 2001)
>
> Out of fear and confusion we have hesitated to name the enemy. We proceed as if we are fighting disparate criminals united by coincidence, rather than the vanguard of militant Islam, united by ideology, sentiment, doctrine, and practice, its partisans drawn from Morocco to the Philippines, Chechnya to the Sudan, a vast swath of the earth that, in regard to the elemental beliefs that fuel jihad, is as homogeneous as Denmark. (Helprin, 2004)

Introduction

Since 11 September 2001, global public debates have intensified around the relationship between Islam, Islamism and violence. A major scientific contribution to the understanding of this relationship has been formulated by what we label the Aarhus approach to Islamism. This approach consists of a series of publications by Professor Mehdi Mozaffari from the Department of Political Science and Post-doc Tina Magaard from the Department of Systematic Theology at the University of Aarhus. We have chosen to treat them as *one* approach, since the publications of the two scholars contribute to a

common research agenda dealing with Islamism as a movement united by a totalitarian ideology, privileging religious texts as evidence. This research agenda is fundamental to a new Center for Research in Islamism and Processes of Radicalization, funded by the Danish Ministry of Defence, which Mozaffari has recently been appointed to direct. Considered together, these studies support the anchoring of a new compound category: Islamofascism.

We find academic as well as strategic problems in this approach, especially as it reproduces overly simplified but influential discourses on the relationship between Islam, Islamism and violence. In our view, academic research focusing on Islamism and the relationship between Islamism and violence should instead aim at disentangling the complexities hiding behind the linguistic singularity inherent in the term *Islamism*. From a strategic perspective, it is urgent to understand what triggers the violent movements and actors and the role of religion vis-à-vis other factors behind violent behaviour and radicalization processes.

Dusting for the fingerprints of totalitarianism in order to understand contemporary Islamist terrorism surely has practical political implications. The present review of the Aarhus approach to Islamism is exactly motivated by the urgent political, strategic and public need to enhance knowledge in this area, since wrongful identification and categorization of the phenomenon may easily lead to inexpedient and miscalculated policy advice, further escalating the dynamic patterns of violence.

The research carried out by the Aarhus approach is also politically relevant in a second sense, as its claims are an active part of the broader public debate about Islam. This is clearly indicated by Maagard's frequent participation in debates on various public Muslim figures and their supposed 'double-speech' (Magaard, 2007b) as well as Mozaffari's signature on the manifesto co-authored by 12 intellectuals (including Salman Rushdie and Ayaan Hirsi Ali) on the occasion of the publication of 12 cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed by Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten* (Ali et al., 2006).

In the following pages, we first discuss the Aarhus definition of Islamism as a *totalitarian ideology*. Secondly, we evaluate the *concordance between the definition and the phenomenon* it is supposed to cover. Thirdly, we question whether these Islamists can be said to constitute *one movement*. Finally, we raise the crucial question of *how texts and ideologies turn into observable practices*, contesting the methodological basis of the Aarhus approach in presupposing an overly simplified – yet still unexplained – causality between holy texts and violence.

Islamism as a totalitarian ideology

The main contribution of the Aarhus approach to the study of Islamism is the suggestion that Islamism constitutes yet another form of totalitarianism. This thesis is forceful and thought-provoking. However, despite the fact that this thesis is central to the Aarhus approach, the key concept of totalitarianism is never defined. This lack of a clear conceptualization of 'totalitarianism' makes it difficult, or even impossible, to assess whether the phenomenon of Islamism would fit into the general definition of totalitarianism.

However, in order to substantiate the thesis that 'Islamism is a totalitarianism', Mozaffari does point out some similarities: 'They are all violent. They believe in the Führerprinzip: the cult of a mythical leader with superman capacities. They are all anti-democratic. They are all "world conquerors". Historically, they are all in different ways one of the major consequences of the First World War' (Mozaffari, 2003a: 2; 2003b: 3).

One can always find similarities between different phenomena; however, the critical question becomes whether the similarities point to a unity which is relevant for some specific purpose. By

exclusively focusing on the similarities between Islamism and the totalitarian movements of the 20th century, the Aarhus approach chooses to ignore the features otherwise possibly distinguishing them from one another: do The Third Reich and the Islamic Republic of Iran constitute the same kind of regimes? Can the *madâris* of Jamaat-e-Islami compare to the Gulag? Is the Muslim Brotherhood a new version of the COMINTERN? Simultaneously, other relevant comparisons – to which we will return in the next section – are glossed over.

However, the Aarhus approach is not interested in such comparisons; rather, it is interested in grasping the very 'essence' of Islamism (Mozaffari, 2007a: 1). This 'essence' is captured in a general definition allegedly covering the phenomenon of Islamism in all its variety and various manifestations. Islamism is defined either as a 'religiously inspired ideology with a *totalitarian* interpretation of Islam' (Mozaffari, 2007b; our italics) or as 'a religious ideology with [a] a *holistic* interpretation of Islam whose [b] final aim is the conquest of the world [c] by all means' (Mozaffari, 2007a; our italics); a third version of the definition adds the adjective [d] 'regressive' to characterize the ideology (Mozaffari, 2006: 24). Mozaffari argues that Islamism can be manifested in three 'phases': 1) first as an ideology, 2) then as a movement, and 3) finally as 'a totalitarian state' (Mozaffari, 2006: 23). This is not a distinctive feature of totalitarianism, however, as most ideologies, including liberalism and social democracy, can be manifest as mere ideology, as movement or as state.

Although Islamism is supposed to be manifest through three phases, the definition proposed by Mozaffari focuses on Islamism as *ideology*. Hence, the question arises as to what exactly makes an ideology totalitarian? Although the concept of totalitarianism is never clearly exposed, it is implied that a 'holistic' ideology is necessarily a 'totalitarian' ideology. It is claimed that Islamism offers a *holistic* interpretation of Islam, since it 'embraces all aspects of Muslims' life' (Mozaffari, 2007a: 23) and provides an interpretation that 'is based on the absolute indivisibility of the trinity *Din* (religion), *Dunya* (way of life) and *Dawla* (government)' (Mozaffari, 2007a: 23).

The causality or relationship between the four totalitarian aspects of Islamism ([a] holism, [b] the aim to conquer the world, [c] the willingness to use all means, and [d] regressiveness) remains unclear. In some texts, Mozaffari is arguing on the basis of a causal relationship between a holistic approach to religion and the need to conquer the world as well as the willingness to 'use all means' (Mozaffari, 2007b: 197). The implication of causality between a holistic vision of Islam and violence is particularly problematic in light of the fact that 'holism' is a part of not just Islamism (radical or not) but also a variety of orthodox and traditional versions of Islam. In the modern context, holistic understandings of religion prevail as a standard perception among Muslims challenging the secular representations of religion being dominant in a European context. Even if Mozaffari insists that we should fight Islamists and not Islam (2003a), the definition offered includes many peaceful Muslims.

A critical question that the Aarhus approach assumes to have answered by the holism inherent in its definition of Islamism is that of how this totalitarian ideology is to be carried out in practice; however, this key question is never raised. The Aarhus approach merely affirms that violence is an intrinsic part of Islamism as ideology, movement and state, since Islamists are willing to use 'all means', including violence. Violence is the rule, whereas abstention from violence is merely an 'exception' (Mozaffari, 2007a: 24). Empirically, however, not all Islamists resort to violence, even if they advocate the all-encompassing relevance of Islam. Mozaffari admits that some Islamist groups claim to be non-violent, but this is merely something that they claim. When the Muslim Brotherhood or the Jamaat-e-Islami accept participating in democratic elections, this is only for 'strategic' or 'prudential' reasons (2007a: 24), since *in reality* they remain violent and ready to use violence in order to attain their final goal: the conquest of the world. It does not matter what Islamists say about their strategy or what their actual practice is; somehow, Mozaffari and Magaard *know* that Islamists are violent, per se. Since the

legitimacy of 'all means' has its sources in 'holism', violence is part of their *definition*; not an empirically induced or tested conclusion.

In order to release the potential of the research agenda, the thesis requires further elaboration. First, it is necessary for the Aarhus scholars to provide a clearer definition of 'totalitarianism' than is currently the case in order to allow for the structured comparison of Islamists with other cases. Second, the Aarhus definition of 'Islamism' focuses exclusively on ideology. Since it is central to the Aarhus approach that Islamism not only comes as ideology, but also as movement and state, the relationship between these three 'phases' must be developed and explained. Are Islamist movements and states a 1:1 application of the ideology? What is the exact nature of this relationship? Third, the Aarhus approach would benefit from empirically conducting studies comparing Islamist movements and states with totalitarian movements and states. This would enable us to clearly assess whether the Islamist Republic of Iran can seriously compare to Nazi Germany. The possibility of this cannot *a priori* be excluded, but the empirical evidence must be provided in a structured manner.

Islamist Ideology: A Regressive World Conquest?

A shift in focus from the suggested definition of Islamism to the existing empirical research on the cases forwarded by the Aarhus approach reveals a mismatch. This bears traces from the definition, rendering certain important dynamics invisible. The two points we will raise in this section relate to 1) the description of radical Islamism as a *regressive* ideology and 2) the claim that radical Islamists ultimately aim at *conquering the world* by establishing a world caliphate.

Striving backwards?

Recent analyses challenge the assertion of the Aarhus approach that Islamists represent a religiously conservative and regressive point of view. This goes for both classical Islamists such as Abul Ala Mawdudi, Hassan Al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, as well as for contemporary Islamists such as Osama Bin Laden. These actors have undoubtedly *legitimized* violent actions with reference to 'Islamic authenticity' and discourses on authentic Islam establish the vocabulary facilitating an interpretation of Islam presenting itself to be unbendable. Examining the content they load into the vocabulary of authenticity, however, this does not mean that they necessarily strive towards the past.

When reading both classical and modern Islamists, it is symptomatic for their narratives that Islam is *first* contextualized, since new and modern measures deviating from traditional notions of what constitutes legitimate measures are rendered necessary for survival. Their narratives reflect dissatisfaction with e.g. specific US policies, including the uncritical support for Israel, the military presence in Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq and the economic sanctions against Iraq after the 1991 Gulf War. The modern measures legitimized by presenting an extraordinary setting include the use of advanced technology, advanced weapons, martyrdom operations and warfare principles of revenge and reciprocity (Sheikh, 2005). After having loaded new content onto the concept of authentic Islam, the narratives *secondly* de-contextualize the concept again (exactly by naming the specific interpretations 'authentic Islam') in order to freeze the possibilities of action and make their interpretations/representations of religion unquestionable.

To avoid the many restrictions and precautions in traditional *fatâwâ* on Muslim behaviour in situations of war, Bin Laden has for example widened the conventional frame of action with a *fatwâ* allowing the killing of civilians, including women and children, if they are among the ranks of the enemy (1998b). In traditional Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, rulings on the conduct of war have been interpreted rather strictly, meaning that harming women, children, the elderly, civilians, buildings, crops,

the ill, the blind, animals and trees has generally been prohibited by almost complete consensus (Ibn Rushd, 1994; cf. Johnson, 2002). Entering into warfare has only been allowed insofar as Muslim territory was attacked. Rejecting such interpretational traditions, Bin Laden introduces principles of reciprocity and revenge as legitimate standards in situations of war having no precedence in the classical past (cf. Bin Laden, 1998a; 2001).

As argued by the researchers behind the Chicago Fundamentalism Project (Marty and Appleby, 1995) and others, a central difference (within all religions) between 'fundamentalists' and 'traditionalists' is the way threats are represented (Sheikh, 2005). Fundamentalists argue that a threat against their religion is *so* urgent and dramatic that being more pious or religiously observant in the traditional sense means failure. Conventional acts of worship or living a virtuous life in accordance with the life of the Prophet Muhammad is not enough under contemporary circumstances. New methods are required to efficiently avert the immediate threat against Islam. In this sense radical Islamists – insisting on the necessity of the most efficient modern tools to restore authenticity – is rather a strange traditional-modern synthesis, fostering a highly contextual approach to authentic Islam.

The categorization of radical Islamism as regressive fails to capture the role of the context these actors are relating to or reacting against. Instead, it confines all explanatory power to the 'ideology' of Islamism. The Aarhus approach could gain by widening the perspective to include the dynamics between text and ideology on one side and context on the other side.

An offensive movement?

Another empirical claim inherent in the Aarhus definition of Islamism is that radical Islamists ultimately aim to conquer the world by establishing a world caliphate (Mozaffari, 2005: 41). However, this claim, implying that radical Islamists act out of an expansive, offensive ideal of change, does not appear to fit the actors Mozaffari refers to as Islamists. Recent analyses of the threat constructions in the narratives of Abul Ala Mawdudi, Hassan Al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Osama Bin Laden and Ahmad Ismail Yasin – all mentioned in Mozaffari's publications – challenge that these characters ultimately aim to restore the caliphate. To the contrary, the narratives of both of these actors and contemporary Salafi Jihadist movements appear pronouncedly defensive or reactive (e.g. Amghar, 2007; Sheikh, forthcoming; cf. Diken and Laustsen, 2004: 13; Philpott, 2002: 85; Juergensmeyer, 2000: 145).

Robert A. Pape, director of the Chicago Project of Suicide Terrorism, concludes on the basis of his analysis of the persons behind suicide attacks between 1995 and 2004 that Al-Qaida is less a result of offensive Islamic fundamentalism than of the isolated strategic struggle to make the United States and its Western allies withdraw their military presence from Muslim countries (Pape, 2005). In his analysis, Samir Amghar calls attention to the circumstance that the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004 'did not aim to punish the victims for their non-respect of Islamic norms, but to pressure Western states, Spain in this case, into withdrawing their troops from Iraq' (2007: 41). This point is also well illustrated in the words of Bin Laden, who stated that the world was 'already at war' years before 9/11 (1998b).

Comparative empirical studies on fundamentalism in different religious denominations report along the same lines that the perception of being under attack is among the most defining features of fundamentalism, legitimizing 'religious' violence (Marty and Appleby, 1995: 409). Hence, fundamentalism or radical Islamism appears to resemble the practice of conventional security politics in the sense that it successfully manages to frame certain acts and issues in a manner elevating their importance to a matter of life and death (Wæver, 2004; Laustsen and Wæver, 2003). The rhetoric of radical Islamists works in a certain 'security political' manner, as the defensive element is a potentially strong mobilizing force.

Since the defensive element is characteristic for fundamentalists across different religious denominations (Juergensmeyer, 2000), a focus on security political discourses appears to be crucial. The development of a two-tracked approach, where research on fundamentalism and security theory is brought into fruitful interplay, can produce insights concerning the dynamics between religion and radicalism valuable to understanding both the role of religion and the role of security dynamics. It could thus be helpful for the Aarhus approach to examine the specific representations of Islam that are sustaining security political claims of defending religion and compare this insight with other instances of securitized religion.

This is not to argue that radical Islamists act *only* against the background of a crisis and a defensive claim, but to cast light on this crucial aspect. As researchers, we have no access to the real personal motives of radical actors. Hence, it will always remain a hypothetical possibility that their 'real motive' is conditioned by backwardness, offensiveness or aggression. Nevertheless, it remains of central *political and strategic* relevance to focus on what makes radical actors successful in mobilizing adherents. This is a serious challenge to the Aarhus approach, as it is unable to grasp how the speech acts of radical Islamists work without making interpretational claims about the motives of the actors. Equally, it does not capture how radicalization can reflect a successful speech act defending different dimensions of Islam against existential threats coming from secularism or specific (military) policies towards Muslim countries (Sheikh, 2005). Dealing with religion in a manner sensitive to the *effects* different *claims* of religion have on legitimizing radical behaviour and mobilizing potential adherents is highly relevant. At the same time, this can contribute to avoiding generalizing claims on what Islam or Islamism is.

As we will return to in the concluding section, analytic attention towards the pronounced grievances of radical Islamists is also important for strategic reasons, since different threat constellations warrant different security analyses and policy.

Islamism as *one* movement

Another central claim of the Aarhus approach is that the phenomenon of 'Islamic terrorism' – used interchangeably with 'Islamism' – is an immediate derivative of the 20th century Islamism (Mozaffari, 2005: 34); and that as such it constitutes *one* movement (Mozaffari, 2007a: 27). Mozaffari's insistence on the unity of Islamism goes hand in hand with a claim pertaining to the existence of two types of 'Islamisms': A global Islamism covering movements such as Al-Qaida and Hizb ut-Tahrir and a local Islamism triggered by national conflicts such as those in Palestine, Kashmir and Chechnya. Such differentiation initially sounds reasonable; in fact, however, it does not provide any clarification of strategic utility concerning the phenomenon.

First, contrary to this 'dualizing' of Islamism, Islamism immediately appears in more than two versions, with more than two stated aims. The existing historical literature and literature dealing with the *raison d'être* of Islamist movements is massive; it suffices to mention the analyses and observations of the most well known movements: The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was formed in efforts to *Islamize the state*; one of the most influential texts written by Hassan Al-Banna was addressed directly to the kings and rulers of the Islamic world (Al-Banna, 1947). Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan works for Islamization through the parliamentary system, which they find legitimate. Hizb ut-Tahrir appeared with an agenda to *relieve Islam* from western colonialism by establishing a *Caliphate* (Hizb ut-Tahrir, 2007). Al-Qaida is, as stated by Bin Laden (1998a), on a mission to *save Islam from its destruction,* since religion is under attack.

So we have Islamist movements with different battles, on different grounds, adhering to different methods aimed at achieving different ends. The global/local distinction might be useful in some circumstances, but it does not help to understand these particularities or – more importantly –

how the local and global in fact play together in the movements: it overlooks the double discourses Islamist movements can draw upon, e.g. why have the narratives of Hamas changed from presenting the liberation of Jerusalem as being a Palestinian duty to instead being a duty for the *global* Muslim ummah? What about the evident existence of a *local* concern about American military bases in Saudi Arabia in the early narratives of Osama Bin Laden?

Considering the diversity of the contextual history of the respective Islamist movements and actors Mozaffari refers to as proof of the validity of his definition, it is, secondly, fundamentally questionable to approach Islamism as *one* single movement with common roots ultimately aiming to restore the lost Caliphate (cf. Mozaffari, 2006: 25). Drawing a straight line from Hassan Al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egypt of 1928 over Aytollah Khomeini in the Iran of 1978 up to the recent era of Al-Qaida requires arguments which are missing from the historical description of the 'Islamic terrorism' (cf. Mozaffari, 2006: 26–7). On this background, it appears quite speculative to define *a priori* Islamism as totalitarianism which will ultimately be incarnated as a fascist state. At least it is against the decisive contextual differences conditioning the existence and aims of different Islamist movements.

Moreover, recent analysis of Salafi Jihadist movements of the 21st century show how the *raison d'être* of these movements lies in the dissatisfaction with the 'soft' approach taken by movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood after the 1990s. As Amghar explains, 'the mobilization power of Salafist discourse is thus the consequence of the rejection of the strategies of social and political participation associated with the Muslim Brotherhood' (2007: 49).

Mozaffari might be correct in claiming that there are similarities between some of these movements, but the linkage between 20th-century Islamist movements and 21st-century Jihadist Salafism or Islamist terrorism does not in any obvious way represent a linear Darwinist progression (or regression) towards a totalitarian state, as otherwise implied. Rather, the current success of Jihadist movements reflects that these chose another path, diagnosing re-Islamization movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood as a failure.

Essentializing Islamism

From the sections above, it is clear that the lack of attention towards the speech acts of Islamists is a constitutive feature of the Aarhus approach, since this allows the approach to make the link between totalitarianism and Islamism. It appears as though the Aarhus approach suffers from two deficits: an anthropological and sociological deficit excluding analyses of practices from the texts they read and a hermeneutical deficit excluding existing varieties of interpretations from their own readings.

The Aarhus approach is first and foremost characterized by an anthropological and sociological deficit, since it predominantly builds upon analyses of religious texts but lacking political, sociological or anthropological contextualization. This tendency to ignore the relevance of empirical evidence is clear from the assertion that Islamism constitutes a *present* danger (Mozaffari, 2006: 23). In order to substantiate this assertion, the Aarhus approach does not provide much new data concerning the current evolution of Islamism. Evidence is primarily found in classical Islamist texts such as Al-Banna, Mawdudi, Qutb and Khomeini. These Islamist thinkers are presented as 'contemporary' (Mozaffari, 2007a: 23); in fact, however, they are all dead and gone and have been so for quite some time (30 to 60 years).

In other words, the left-behind texts of dead Islamists appear more important than what is said and done today: we do not need to listen anyway, since we already know what Islamists would *really* like to do by inference from the holism inherent in the definition of Islamism.

Such prioritization of texts over practice and definitional evidence over empirical evidence gives rise to the following question: how dangerous can a text be? If thorough analyses of the Quran or the writings of Islamist thinkers should allow us to better assess the present danger of Islamist totalitarianism and terror, we must at least reflect on the relationship between such texts and the practice of Islamists; however, the Aarhus approach is less than specific as regards the nature of this relationship. Indicative of how this question falls between the political science of Mozaffari and the textual exegesis of Magaard are their articles, which together constitute the discussion of Islamism in a recent volume on the relationship between totalitarianism and extreme friend/enemy images, co-edited by Mozaffari (Thorup, Schantz and Mozaffari, 2007).

Magaard concludes her contribution by claiming that 'Read literally, the Quran, the Hadith and the Surah purvey a stock of narratives and an arsenal of enemy images for the Islamists to use to structure their actions as well as their world views of friends and enemies' (2007a: 227). To legitimize the naked focus on Quranic quotes, she excludes a problem absolutely central to the conceptualization of Islamism as totalitarianism: '[T]he Quranic enemy images and thematics of violence are used in various ways by the individual Islamist groupings. Certain political and sociological considerations which are beyond the field of this textual analytical study enter the picture' (2007a: 227).

Mozaffari, however, does supply some of these 'political and sociological considerations'. In his contribution to the same volume, the considerations amount to the enumeration of three 'motives in Islam' behind the categorization of friends and enemies (2007b: 205–6). The first motive is given by the categories of the Quran. Mozaffari notes that these 'are in principle static and may theoretically not be changed. An openness may, however, be noted towards various and at times conflicting interpretations clearing the way for various forms of manipulation' (2007b: 205). It seems to be this openness which clears the way for the two additional motives: 'political criteria', which is primarily made synonymous with a means to mobilize and moreover portrayed as the most common motive, and 'contextual circumstances' which, according to Mozaffari, include friend/enemy relations varying across sectarian divides and other dividing lines among Muslims.

Numerous objections can be raised to these 'political and sociological considerations': most basically, it remains unclear how access is gained to 'motives in Islam' (2007b: 205) and whether this actually translates to the motives of Muslims. If Mozaffari is mapping the motives 'in Islam', then he must first answer a basic question about whose Islam we are talking about. Though Mozaffari agrees that competing interpretational traditions among Muslims exist (Mozaffari, 2003a), he neglects to explain how *he* is then able to identify the authoritative 'motives in Islam' which can be derived from the Quran.

Furthermore, it is not clear according to which 'theories' and 'principles' the Quran is unchanging: Is it according to the Quranic text itself? And if so, how can a text – or Mozaffari – dismiss the possibility of interpretations changing the meaning of the text? Or is it only according to some traditions of Quranic interpretation that the text resists interpretation? Can a text at all resist interpretation without help from human beings? If so, how is the Aarhus approach able to gain privileged access to the pure text?

These questions cover the discussion of what determines history: the structure of a text or the performance of agency. The answer is, of course, neither/nor. Magaard is correct in claiming that her analyses of Quranic text are merely one part of a 'multi-causal analysis' (2007a: 213); however, she abstains from explaining why and exactly how the text is an entry into the 'motives of Islamic groups'

(Magaard, 2007a: 213). This point deserves more scrutiny before answering the question of how dangerous a text can be; especially in a situation in which public debate readily accepts prognoses concerning the actions and motives of billions based on the quotation of Quranic verses.

The hermeneutics of Mozaffari and Magaard is similar to the way fundamentalists read religious text: they claim to possess privileged insight into 'the real' religion. Mozaffari and Magaard have read the text and present textual evidence regarding its correct interpretation; evidence ignoring and outnumbering centuries of Muslim scholarship and the interpretations it has given rise to. The friend-enemy constellations counted and accounted for by Magaard represent the static essence of Islam: 'Look – it's right there in the text!' And that counts more than the 'explaining away' reflected in the manifold existing exegesis of the Quran.

Conclusion

While the Aarhus approach is explicitly interested in researching Islamism in order to combat 'Islamic terrorism' (Mozaffari, 2006: 26), neither the 'Islamism' label nor the definition suggested provide any immediate tools for distinguishing militant or radical movements from others. As Islamism both appears in violent versions involved in armed conflict and as charity organizations performing a social and humanist role, it serves an immediate purpose to add the adjective 'militant' or 'radical' to the research-agenda. Such minor manoeuvres can reduce the stereotyping of Islamist movements and enhance clarification about the errand of the Aarhus research agenda.

Instead, the Aarhus approach effectively positions Islamism amongst the totalitarian movements of the 20th century by equating Islamism and totalitarianism. As Ian Buruma notes, however, it is not particularly enlightening to compare Osama Bin Laden with Joseph Stalin or Adolf Hitler: 'They were all very nasty, but other than that there is not much to be gained from such comparisons' (2007: 2); except that this contention holds clear political implications. As Mozaffari concludes, 'the totalitarian danger has not yet disappeared' (Mozaffari, 2006: 23), hence 'the world of today has no other choice but to continue to combat Islamism, just as the world of 1939 combated Nazism and Fascism' (Mozaffari, 2005: 42). A convenient new enemy has been provided for 'the free world'.

The Aarhus approach gains most of its leverage by implying that holism and Islamism equals totalitarianism and by jumping from text over practice to danger. This approach lacks methodological sensitivity to the empirical world and reflects anthropological, sociological and hermeneutical deficits. The search for the 'real motives' of Islamists renders the Aarhus approach inattentive towards the grievances expressed in Islamist narratives. From a strategic perspective, such inattention poses serious problems. Not that the Islamists are necessarily correct, but their grievances matter from a dynamic perspective on conflict. If they act in defence, perceiving Islam as threatened by Western secularism, a firm hand on behalf of secularism might not offer the optimal means with which to defuse the conflict (Sheikh and Wæver, forthcoming).

The problem with the Aarhus approach to Islamism is the manner in which it releases the West from any kind of responsibility for the frustrations pronounced in Islamist narratives. If Islamists are *by definition* categorized as aggressive, faith-driven, unreasonable and expansionist, then elimination of the Other seems like the only option for Us to survive.

Breaking cycles of violence requires willingness to establish a space for negotiation, politics and dialogue; a space that invites varieties of secularists, holist Muslims and Islamists who are willing to enter. Insisting on knowing the true intentions of an opponent does not work very well as an invitation; quite the opposite, creating such a space requires a self-critical attitude on all sides, i.e. a willingness to

evaluate how one's own dogmas, policies and signals contribute to keeping conflicts alive. Obviously, an approach which *by definition* deems the opponent to be a violent, totalitarian contender for world hegemony does not require such space, since it would only count as a distraction.

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Notes

1. Quotations from texts in the Danish are translated by the authors of this review article.

2. The historical-sociological comparison of the post-WWI roots of these movements should be on its way (Mozaffari, 2007c), and we have yet to see who Mozaffari will appoint to be the mythical leader of a unified Islamist movement to compare with Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin. In this review article, we concentrate on the consequences of the supposed totalitarian core of Islamist ideology and the supposed unity of the Islamist movement.

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